

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 0996

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SUBJECT: REMOVAL OF ABU LUHUM BROTHERS

REF: SANAA 968 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: IN QUICK, LOW KEY, SURGICAL MOVEMENT PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI ON EVENING OF APRIL 27 NAMED NEW LOYAL COMMANDERS TO ALL OF THE KEY MILITARY UNITS IN THE YEMENI ARMED FORCES WHILE REMOVING THE TWO ABU LUHUM BROTHERS FROM THEIR COMMANDS OF THE RESERVE FORCE AND THE SIXTH ARMORED BRIGADE RESPECTIVELY. WITH THIS CHANGE, HAMDI IS NOW IN EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THE YEMENI ARMY. THE ONLY DANGER NOW IS THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN AL-HAMDI AND SHAIKH AL-AHMAR, IF THE LATTER BELIEVES HE IS NEXT ON HAMDI'S LIST. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A ROUTINE AND LOW KEY MANNER, SANAA RADIO ANNOUNCED LAST NIGHT (APRIL 27) DURING ITS REGULAR EVENING NEWSCAST "DECISION" TAKEN BY COMMANDER IN CHIEF IBRAHIM AL-HAMDI "IN CONSULTATION" WITH CHIEF OF STAFF AHMAD AL-GHASHMI TO APPOINT NEW COMMANDERS AND CHIEFS
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OF OPERATIONS TO THE FIRST AND SIXTH ARMORED BRIGADES

AS WELL AS TO THE RESERVE FORCE. IN A RATHER SARDONIC FOLLOW-ON TO THIS ANNOUNCEMENT (WE ASSUME FUTHER FBIS TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE TO DEPARTMENT), THE STATION ALSO INFORMED ITS LISTENERS THAT AL-HAMDI HAD SENT LETTERS TO ALI ABU LUHUM AND MUHAMMAD ABU LUHUM, PREVIOUS COMMANDERS OF THE RESERVE FORCE AND OF THE SIXTH ARMORED BRIGADE RESPECTIVELY, "THANKING THEM FOR THEIR SERVICES BEFORE AND AFTER JUNE 13 REFORM MOVEMENT".

2. EARLIER SAME EVENING ALL MILITARY UNITS IN SANAA AREA WERE PLACED ON FULL ALERT WHILE THE AIRPORT AND SANAA RADIO STATION WERE SURROUNDED BY SPECIAL UNITS. DURING THE DAY, TROOPS WERE ALSO BROUGHT BACK FROM THE SOUTH WHERE THEY HAD BEEN ENGAGING IN OPERATIONS AGAINST TERRORIST GANGS. THE CITY QUICKLY BUTTONED UP AND THERE WERE CHECK POINTS ON ALL MAJOR INTERSECTIONS FOR THE REST OF THE NIGHT. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS SPORADIC GUNFIRE A FEW TIMES, THIS HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO THE TWO-DAY MILITARY EXERCISES WHICH SANAA RADIO ANNOUNCED ON APRIL 25 WOULD TAKE PLACE BOTH DAY AND NIGHT ON SLOPES OF JABAL NUQUM OVERLOOKING SANAA. SANAA THIS MORNING HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL.

3. COMMENT: WITH THESE NEW APPOINTMENTS (FULL BIO DATA WILL BE SUBMITTED SEPARATELY IN DATT MESSAGE) AND THE REMOVAL OF THE ABU LUHUM BROTHERS FROM THEIR MILITARY COMMANDS, HAMDI HAS TAKEN EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF ALL OF THE KEY UNITS IN THE YEMENI ARMED FORCES. THE ONLY UNIT OF DOUBTFUL LOYALTY IS THE BUBACALLED MAJD BRIGADE COMMANDED BY MUJAHID ABU SHUWARIB BUT ITS EFFICACY AS A FIGHTING FORCE IS MARGINAL AT BEST. WE MUST ASSUME UNTIL FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE THAT HAMDI'S MOVE WAS TAKEN WITH THE ACQUIESCENCE IF NOT APPROVAL OF SHAIKH ABDULLAH AL-AHMAR WHO FOR THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS HAS BEEN THE OBJECT OF A SUSTAINED ABU LUHUM EFFORT TO TURN HIM AGAINST AL-HAMDI. IT IS POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, THAT HAMDI'S DECISION TO MOVE AGAINST THE ABU LUHUMS MAY HAVE BEEN A UNILATERAL ONE, CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE CONVENIENT ABSENCE OF ABU SHUWARIB IN COMMUNIST CHINA ON A SHOPPING TRIP FOR HIS UNIT; THE LATTER HAS BEEN CLOSE TO THE ABU LUHUMS AND IS ALSO BUBTHER-IN-LAW OF AL-AHMAR. IF THAT IS THE CASE, WE MAY STILL BE IN FOR FURTHER CONFRONTATION BETWEEN AL-AHMAR AND AL-HAMDI AS PREDICTED BY MINISTER OF STATE ABU SAID (SEE REFTTEL), ESPECIALLY IF ALTTER NOW BELIEVES HIMSELF TO BE NEXT ON HAMDI'S LIST. THE

DEMISE OF THE ABU LUHUMS WILL NOT BE MOURNED BY EITHER THE MILITARY OF THE GENERAL POPULATION AS THEIR REPUTATION FOR SKULLDUGGERY AND CORRUPTION WAS NOTORIOUS. DIRHAM ABU LUHUM, COMMANDER OF THE TAIZ MILITARY DISTRICT AND COUSIN OF ABU LUHUM BROTHERS, REMAINS IN HIS OFFICE AND ALSO MEMBER OF THE COMMAND COUNCIL. HE COMMANDS NO TROOPS, HOWEVER, AND HAS REPORTEDLY OVER LAST SEVERAL MONTHS ASSURED HAMDI OF HIS LOYALTY, DESPITE MACHINATIONS OF HIS UNCLE SINAN ABU LUHUM AND HIS COUSINS. HAMDI MAY HAVE ALSO DECIDED IT WAS MORE POLITIC TO KEEP DIRHAM AROUND AS BOTH A SIGN OF MODERATION AND STRENGTH. HAMDI'S REMOVAL OF GHASHMI AS COMMANDER OF FIRST BRIGADE MAY HAVE ALSO BEEN TAKEN TO SOFTEN THE BLOW TO THE ABU LUHUMS BUT IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT HAMDI WISHES TO PERMIT GHASHMI, A CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND, TO DEVOTE FULL ATTENTION TO THE LATTER'S DUTIES AS THE CHIEF OF STAFF. LT COL HAMUD QATINA, WHO REPLACES GHASHMI AS COMMANDER OF THE FIRST ARMORED BRIGADE, IS CONSIDERED TO BE AN EXCELLENT SOLDIER AND TOTALLY LOYAL TO HAMDI.

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